

Exploring Atypical CJCC Structures: Independent Coordinating Councils

As Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils (CJCCs) continue to expand in number and scope across the country, their organizational structure has become an important factor in working with justice stakeholders and implementing initiatives in their communities. JMI sat down with two members of the [National Network of Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils](#) (NNCJCC) - Chris Csonka, Executive Director of [East Baton Rouge Criminal Justice Coordinating Council](#), and Catoya Roberts, director of [Milwaukee Community Justice Council](#) - to discuss how their organizations became consolidated entities and how that has impacted their CJCC's work.

East Baton Rouge, LA

The East Baton Rouge CJCC is an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which was its structure from inception in 2019 after being selected as a Safety and Justice Challenge implementation site, funded through the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The decision to become a nonprofit was a direct response to this award, which stipulated that awardees needed a centralized implementation site.



Operating as an independent entity grants East Baton Rouge's CJCC more autonomy than many traditional CJCCs. Chris identified their nonprofit status as an asset that allows them to bypass many bureaucratic hurdles. They are also viewed as a neutral organization when it comes to stakeholder relationships, enabling them to build trust holistically with diverse agencies. Chris feels their nonprofit status strengthens the credibility of their relationships, not just with justice stakeholders, but also with community organizations and individuals. It also encourages greater collaboration and trust from the community. Additionally, their independence allows the CJCC to qualify for more grants, including those specific to nonprofit organizations; for grants limited to government agencies, the CJCC can partner with agencies to meet eligibility requirements. The CJCC's improved funding ability fortifies relationships and positions them as an organization that can assist specific agencies as well as bring stakeholders together.



Christopher Csonka
Executive Director






The potential drawback of nonprofit status is sustainability. With no dedicated line item in the city or county budget, funding is a primary concern, especially as they operate a dedicated workspace. Currently, the CJCC is primarily funded by the MacArthur Foundation, alongside funding from the city for their pretrial diversion program.

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To achieve sustainability, East Baton Rouge has found success in applying for funds with philanthropic organizations, especially for new initiatives. Operational costs not tied to specific programs can be less exciting for outside funders, and sustainability concerns usually center this area, although increased city funding is expected for 2025.

Board positions for local chamber of commerce and community foundations are also vital for sustainability and a holistic CJCC. Their presence brings a non-governmental perspective as well as possible private or non-standard funding avenues to the table. Many philanthropic organizations can be siloed, and creating board positions for a wide range of voices creates a more comprehensive conversation, and gives organizations access to information and support they may not otherwise have come across.

Key Takeaways:

-  Established as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization in 2019 after receiving a Safety and Justice Challenge grant
-  Operating as an independent nonprofit provides more independence than traditional CJCCs, allowing them to avoid bureaucratic hurdles
-  Being a neutral organization helps build trust and credible relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, including justice agencies and community organizations
-  Nonprofit status allows an opportunity to qualify for grants specifically for nonprofits, and they can partner with government agencies to qualify for other grants
-  Funding flexibility helps fortify stakeholder relationships and positions the CJCC as an organization that can bring stakeholders together
-  Sustainability is a concern without a dedicated line item in the city/county budget, but they have found success identifying funding elsewhere

When asked for advice to CJCCs interested in pursuing nonprofit status, Chris identified the support of justice entities as a crucial factor. Ensuring that members understand the value of the CJCC - not just as a whole, but to their specific agency - by identifying shared priorities and goals for initiatives creates buy-in. Forming relationships with agencies, specifically with department leaders, is necessary to garner support and to spread publicity and a healthy reputation for the CJCC. Agencies should understand that a CJCC can assist them with grant funding and initiative implementation, but that the CJCC will also require support, especially for operating costs; a small dues fee may be prudent to aid with sustainability.

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Finally, although the CJCC should coordinate with the community, it is important to distinguish it from community advocacy groups. The goal of the CJCC is to represent all sides of the justice system and facilitate conversations between stakeholders, not work in opposition to them. Establishing a clear understanding of the CJCC's work and building trust with stakeholders will ensure stronger, more stable initiatives.

Milwaukee, WI

The Milwaukee Community Justice Council (CJC) was founded in 2007 by a resolution from the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors. Like East Baton Rouge, they are funded through the Safety and Justice Challenge, as well as by the Bureau of Justice (BJA) Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG). However, unlike East Baton Rouge, they are not an incorporated 501(c)(3), but instead have a physical sponsor. The sponsor entity provides increased independence to the CJCC by reducing funding competition and ensuring no one justice agency has a closer tie than others. This structure can create additional organizational steps, particularly for managing grant approvals, board members, and other CJCC operational activities.



Catoya Roberts
Director

However, even these additional required actions can be seen as beneficial, as communications and organization within the CJC are strengthened by the practices.

As the CJC is not an incorporated nonprofit, they are still ineligible for some grant opportunities when searching for additional funding. To address this gap, the CJC has been convening with business partners and philanthropic organizations to address expansion. Business communities are often missing from conversations on public safety, and Milwaukee's CJC has been able to engage with this facet of the community as both a contributor to conversations on public safety, as well as a possible additional funding stream.

The operation of the Milwaukee CJC as a distinct entity creates the opportunity to center community voices in conversations they have historically felt excluded from. City and county employees serve on the executive committee, but members treat each other as peers, not superiors; the result is a culture that supports strong engagement from law enforcement, the community, and justice-involved individuals.

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In the past, town hall sessions with executive committee members and interview sessions with CJCC members and the greater community have provided platforms for voices that may otherwise not feel they have an opportunity to speak. These convenings, alongside strategic planning meetings, allow the CJC to identify priority areas and campaigns for initiatives that reflect the interests of the entire community. From these conversations and the work of the council, Milwaukee's CJC has implemented initiatives in violence prevention, mental health and trauma, housing and developing Youth Justice initiative.

Key Takeaways:



Founded in 2007 by a resolution from the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors



Not an incorporated 501(c)(3) nonprofit, but has a physical sponsor entity



Having a sponsor entity provides increased independence by reducing funding competition and ensuring no one justice agency has an advantage



Being an independent entity allows them to better center community voices in conversations, treating all members as peers rather than superiors



Conducts town halls and strategic planning to identify priority areas and initiatives that reflect the interests of the entire community



Implemented strategies in a variety of areas (violence prevention, behavioral health, mental health, trauma, and juvenile justice)

Both NNCJCC member sites demonstrate how an organization's structure can impact stakeholder relationships, funding sustainability, and public trust. While no one model is ideal for every community, structures can be amended to best situate CJCCs to take advantage of specific relationships or assets in their jurisdictions, or to address gaps in the conversation. We would like to thank the interviewees for their time and willingness to demonstrate the work of their CJCCs in supporting initiatives throughout the justice system and promoting public safety. For more information on the NNCJCC, visit the [JMI website](#) or contact aimeew@jmijustice.org